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Delivered to the

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D I O C E S E o f L I N C O L N ,

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The B I S H O P ' s P r i m a r y V i s i t a t i o n ,
M D C C L X I I .

A n d P U B L I S H E D a t t h e i r R E Q U E S T ,

K. Green
B Y

JOHN LORD BISHOP of LINCOLN.

. L O N D O N ,

Printed for B. Don and Co. in Ave-Mary-Lane.
M D C C L X V .

C H A R C E

Delivered to the

C L E R G Y

OF THE

DIOCESE OF LINCOLN



The Bishop's Primary Visitation

MDCCLXXII

And Published at the Request

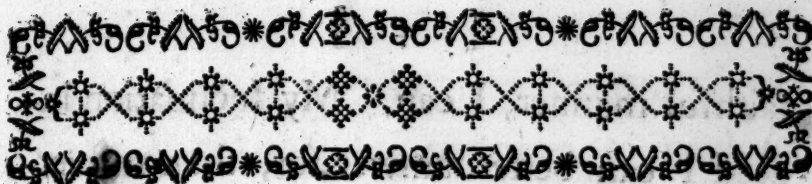
BY

JOHN LEED, Bishop of Lincoln

L O N D O N

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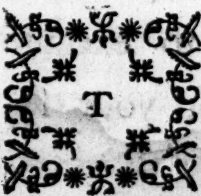


A

CHARGE

Delivered to

The CLERGY of the DIOCESE
of LINCOLN.

 HIS Meeting, Reverend Brethren, must awaken your concern, for the loss which you have suffer'd by the removal of so vigilant and experienc'd a Pastor: whose attention to the several duties of his office, and whose abilities to superintend the affairs of so extensive a jurisdiction justly intitled him to your good opinion and esteem.

This loss I will not be wanting in my best endeavours to supply; and in the most

faithful manner, I can. My Inclination indeed I can better answer for, than my experience or attainments. What talents I have, shall I trust be duely apply'd to the duties of that charge, to which his Majesty's favour has appointed me. A common share of industry may suffice for the ordinary business which belongs to this situation: and in cases of niceness or difficulty, which may require more prudence to consider, or more firmness to execute them properly, I must hope for your favourable support and assistance.

The present occasion will naturally lead us to a subject, always proper for our consideration, and highly interesting to us; which our holy profession requires us at all times duely to attend to; but which the nature and end of this meeting call upon us to look into with more particular attention; that is, the state of religion among us. We
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are authoriz'd by the appointment of our Master, to teach it's doctrines, to inculcate it's precepts, to promote, in the most proper way we can, it's true interests; we are commission'd under the laws of our country to explain it's meaning, to consult it's credit, to forward it's advancement. We should then consider what causes contribute to quicken or retard it's progress; we should be industrious to furnish what helps we are able to it's improvement, to remove what impediments we can to it's proficiency. It will certainly behove us to reflect seriously, how well we have executed an office of so much trust, how well we have supported a character of such importance.

The publick welfare is more concern'd perhaps, than is commonly apprehended, in the issue of this enquiry. For he must be a very superficial observer, who does not see, how intimate a connexion there does, and

will ever subsist between religion and government, and how necessary the influence of the one is to the effectual support and well-being of the other. It is plain to every man, who looks farther than the surface of things, that the powers with which the civil magistrate is invested, and the operation of those penal laws which he is intrusted to execute, will often be insufficient to keep men within the bounds of duty; much less will they prevail with them to answer properly all the other moral or civil relations of life, which they bear to each other; least of all are they fitted to produce those various acts of benevolence, and that mutual intercourse of good offices, which are so essential to the peace and happiness of society.

There are many cases, in which the morality of our actions is concern'd, which are not and cannot be provided for by any legal

sanctions; and in those, which are provided for, craft may sometimes conceal, or learned skill may defend, or numbers may protect from the arm of civil authority. The doctrine therefore of a moral governor, to whose infallible judgment we must all be accountable, and who will at last assign to all his intelligent creatures that just distinction, which their respective conduct deserves; this is the only adequate and universal ground of obligation, which will reach to all persons, extend to all cases, operate in all situations; which will penetrate the retirement of the closet, and pierce to the inward recesses of the heart; as well as controul those actions, which are open to inspection, and perform'd on the publick theatre of the world.

So great is the trust, my Brethren, to which we are appointed, when to us are "committed the oracles of God;" of such

consequence is the charge, with which we are invested, when in our hands is placed the sacred depositum of our holy faith! and a degree of diligence is certainly to be used, proportionable to the extent and importance of the province that is assigned us; a fidelity will doubtless be expected from us, answerable to the weight and usefulness of the service, which we are required to perform,

Complaints are made loudly and every where, by all sober persons, and I am afraid, not made without reason, that not only the outward ordinances of religion are too much neglected, but what is the usual consequence of such a neglect, that a just and proper sense of it is declining, and it's due and natural authority lessen'd among all ranks and degrees of men; that not only the solemnities of public worship, and the devout celebration of God's service are slighted; but that the pernicious effects of it are felt in a
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manifest decay of that good principle which should influence the heart; and when it does duely influence it, will not fail to regulate the conduct.

Such is the representation, so unpromising the appearance of our religious affairs; we hope indeed they are not so bad, as some melancholy men may be apt to imagine, or some morose ones may be willing to represent them; for if there are some causes, which help to deprave, there are others which tend to reform the manners of the age; that confusion of right and wrong in actions and characters, which the violence of party introduc'd, will be lessen'd we hope by the abatement of these divisions; that neglect of God's worship, and contempt of publick order, which we complain of in the higher ranks of life, will in some degree we trust be amended, as they are discountenanced by the authority of the highest station,

tion, the example of our excellent and religious King.

Our religious observances have been lately made a more liberal and reasonable service, more worthy of the great object to which it is to be paid, more suitable to the nature of these intelligent beings, by whom it is to be perform'd. — Numberless characters of divine wisdom and goodness have been discover'd by that assiduity with which later ages have enquir'd into the works of God:—The nature of those connexions, by which national governments are supported, and the blessing of social intercourse extended to all civilized countries; the duties which belong to individuals, and result from the various relations we bear to each other; all these have been of late ascertained with more exactness. — And no inconsiderable share of praise is due to the learned of our own profession for the light that has been
thrown

thrown upon these useful subjects; for banishing by the gradual openings of science those spectres of superstition, which terrified our forefathers; for the juster notions, which are now entertain'd of God's nature and perfections, and the more rational manner of celebrating his worship; for stating more distinctly the obligations of morality; for tracing with more accuracy the origin and extent of civil and religious establishments, for vindicating with becoming spirit the rights and liberties of mankind.—But then have men in general, have we ourselves been more assiduous in paying our religious service, as our judgment about the manner of doing it has been more improv'd? Have our devout acknowledgments more abounded to the governor of the world, as we have more discern'd the wisdom and benignity of his government? Have we better practis'd the duties of social life, as we have better understood the nature and use of our moral and civil

civil connexions? Have we more carefully avoided the narrow plan of a vicious self-interest, as we have more clearly seen it's inconsistency with general good, and the engagements we are under to the publick?

If the practice of others or our own has not been agreeable to our improv'd knowledge of these good principles, will it not behove us to reflect, by what means it has happen'd that such reasonable expectations have not been answer'd? Ought we not to consider whether we have so well acquitted ourselves of the great trust reposed in us, that we are liable to no just imputation of blame or neglect? We must indeed expect such equitable allowances to be made to our conduct, as the difficulties of our station plead for; some of it's duties are not to be discharged properly without much assiduity and resolution, others without great prudence and address, most of them lay us
open

open to ill will or suspicion from persons of different views, opinions and characters.

If we have executed our trust with due fidelity, we shall in no wise lose our reward, we shall not want, what we should most value, the home-felt satisfaction of our own bosoms; we shall probably have the esteem of good men, we shall certainly have the approbation of our righteous judge. If on proper recollection we find ourselves to have been remiss or deficient in any material points, let us be assiduous to correct any mistakes in our judgment, to supply any failures in our duty, to rectify any inadvertencies in our conduct. It may appear perhaps from an impartial survey, that we have been as far from doing all the good which has been in our power, as from doing all the mischief which has been laid to our charge.

Let nothing, my brethren, divert us from improving ourselves in all useful parts of science; of those especially, which may tend to explain, defend or enforce the great truths of our religion. Farther advances in that knowledge, a competent share of which was necessary at our entrance on the duties of our ministry, will be as necessary for the successful execution of it. It will ill become the seriousness of our character to waste that time in any trivial avocations, which we have solemnly dedicated to the service of the temple; nor shall we well consult our credit with considerate men, if we should endeavour to excel in these arts, which contribute to our amusement, or our interest, while we neglect such as immediately relate to the business of the profession we are engaged in, and the illustration of the doctrines which we have undertaken to teach.

Such

Such an acquaintance with the nature and evidence of our holy Faith, as may be proper for our situation, is not to be attain'd without attention and diligence : and when such a knowledge of it is attain'd, as may enable us to give a reasonable account of the hope that is in us, yet a farther proficiency may be made by a more accurate survey of it's several parts ; the foundation on which it is built, the authenticity and true meaning of the sacred records in which it is contain'd, the nature and intention of the doctrines, precepts, threatnings and promises, which it comprehends. The talents indeed of men, and the opportunities of improving them, are very different ; yet we are all equally accountable for the due exercise of those talents, and the proper use of those opportunities, which providence has vouchsafed us.

The duties of our holy function are so different, that room may be found, in the various parts of it's administration, for the employment of men's various abilities. A moderate capacity will be sufficient for the due discharge of some of it's offices; some will require a more enlarg'd knowledge and improv'd understanding; while others call for a good share of natural endowments, cultivated with the most successful application. It is partly owing to the ill will of our enemies, partly to the ill judgment of our pretended friends, that on this theatre, attainments of every kind may find a proper place, and while a common capacity may be usefully employed in the common duties of our profession, opportunities will be given, in cases of more niceness and difficulty, for the exertion of the best talents and of the greatest discernment.

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The ministration of divine service in the daily offices of the church may be thought no arduous task ; nor is it such ; but yet it requires more care to be performed well, and more depends on the right performance of it, than is commonly apprehended. Our Liturgy, though it may share the fate of all human compositions, and be not free from exception, yet it is in general ably compos'd : the matter and manner of it are well adapted to the several subjects of which it treats, and the occasions to which it refers. There runs through it a clear and manly simplicity, there is often great force of expression and dignity of sentiment ; there are sometimes masterly strokes of unaffected eloquence : yet the clearness in a great measure, the strength and energy will be entirely lost by an hasty and indistinct delivery. That propriety of diction and fulness of sense may be so far stifled or disguised by a supine and spiritless manner, as to act upon

the hearers with less force and effect, than the raw and undigested matter of extemporary effusions.

It is acknowledg'd, that we exceed all our neighbour nations in the solidity and weight of our discourses from the pulpit; let us then not fall short of them in that forcible elocution, which is proper to raise the attention and animate the affections of a popular audience. The gravity and seriousness of our countrymen may not bear all that pomp of action, which pleases the temper of some foreigners; but yet we must be in earnest ourselves, before we can expect to make others so; if we are not affected in delivering the weighty commands of our religion, we are not to wonder if others are indifferent in receiving them; a cold and remiss manner of speaking will weaken the force of every argument, and defeat the effect of every persuasion.

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It will concern us especially at this time not to be languid or careless in our instructions, when itinerant preachers aim to establish their credit with the people by the unfavourable representations they make of our indolence in discharging this part of our pastoral duty. Let us not be sparing of our voice, or lifeless in our utterance, when we hear what wonders are done daily by dint of loudness and vehemence.

And as we should be earnest in laying open to our people the great truths of the gospel, as the gracious charter of all our christian privileges; so we should be assiduous in studying it, as the inexhaustible source of divine wisdom. This study will amply reward the labour of the industrious and well-intention'd. A good disposition to practice what we learn there, may be one of the best means to facilitate our progress; but yet it is not the only means we should in

prudence use. A masterly skill in the language of the sacred records, an accurate survey of the customs, manners, and opinions of the ages to which they have a reference; a careful attention to the design and reasoning of the authors in the different parts of their writings, will doubtless afford farther helps to improve us in the knowledge of them; and these helps let us freely have recourse to, though the fanaticks of this and of every age have labour'd, for private reasons of their own, to discourage the use and depreciate the value of human attainments.

The practical doctrines of christianity should make the principal part of our instructions; free as may be from those controverted points, which promote and perpetuate dissension, and unentangled with those subtleties which perplex instead of informing common understandings. The serious and affecting sense of a moral governor,

nor, under whose awful inspection we now act, and to whose unerring judgment we must at last be subject, we should never fail to inculcate with the utmost force and earnestness. If the impressions of this great truth decay or grow weaker in the minds of men, we should be more assiduous to renew, we should be more zealous to strengthen them, as essential to men's true interests, as the best source of comfort to themselves, as the firmest bond of security to the publick.

But while we are maintaining this great principle of morality, let us also keep in mind the fundamental truths of revelation; while we insist on the necessity of personal righteousness, let us not omit the gospel-scheme of our redemption, by which our imperfect righteousness is made available to salvation. It is under the terms of that gracious covenant, which was obtain'd for us by the death and merits of Christ, that the

pardon of sin is promised to our sincere repentance, that the assistances of God's holy spirit are vouchsafed to be granted to us, and our faithful endeavours to obey will be accepted instead of compleat and undeviating obedience. But then let us content ourselves with those plain declarations, which the sacred writings have made on this subject; let us not perplex our hearers with nice speculations of our own or the fanciful theories of others, which the learned may not, and the unlearned certainly do not understand.

Nor let us on the other hand depreciate natural religion, that we may magnify the excellency of reveal'd. When duly understood, they help to confirm and illustrate each other. The one contains maxims of established truth and unquestionable utility; by whose help the evidence of the other, as a divine dispensation, may be more clearly ascertain'd, and the justness of its precepts

more distinctly shewn; and to this law the sacred writers themselves often make an express reference.

Our Saviour's instructions, as set down in the authentic record of his ministry, were chiefly occasional, arose from such opportunities as presented themselves, or served to resolve some questions, that were propos'd to him. They were express'd in general maxims, or in such familiar parables, as suited the manners and genius of that age. But then he supply'd the capital defect in all other institutions by settling the true principle of obedience, and by the appointment of a just and final retribution has fixed that inseparable connexion between virtue and happiness, which will ever be the firmest ground of moral and religious obligation.

All the different manifestations, which God has been pleas'd to make of his will,

plainly tend to carry on one great and gracious design of promoting men's felicity by improving their nature, or of making their advancement in holiness the most certain method for the attainment of happiness: and men have been led into the most dangerous mistakes by following the suggestions of a warm fancy, or wandering in the mazes of doubtful speculation, instead of attending to this great truth, as it lies open to our view in the monuments of holy writ.

This great principle will teach us, that though we must not presume to comprehend the whole extent of God's government, yet we may see so much as to satisfy us, that it is not conducted in an arbitrary and capricious manner; that though the outward goods of life are often bestowed here without any respect to men's moral qualifications, yet in the final allotment of things, a strict regard will be had to the real merit or demerit

merit of his accountable creatures: that as our righteous judge cannot accept men without goodness, so neither will he condemn them without guilt; such a measure of goodness, as our imperfect natures can attain, will make us proper objects of his favour; such a degree of habitual guilt, as shews a bad and deprav'd heart, will as certainly expose us to his displeasure. Let us be careful then not to furnish men with any expedients, which may sooth them in the commission of sin, and reconcile the indulgence of their passions with the injunctions of religion.

As the sacred writers use the word Faith in different senses, let us not quote these passages in so indiscriminating a manner, as to lead our hearers into dangerous mistakes about it's nature and efficacy. It often signifies the whole of the gospel-dispensation, and comprehends whatever Christ did and
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suffered and taught and required of men in order to their salvation ; so that to obey what he enjoyn'd is as necessary a part of it, as to believe what he propos'd ; and if we agree in this essential point, that such a faith as is lively and operative, as carries men on to a proper course of action, and produces it's genuine fruits of obedience, is necessary to our final acceptance with God, why should we perplex common understandings, and disturb the church of Christ with terms never used, or distinctions never made in the sacred volumes ?

We should proceed with the same caution, when we speak of the expiation made by the merits and death of Christ. Their beneficial effects must be explain'd with those restrictions, and kept within those bounds which the gospel assigns them. Let his sacrifice be called perfect and all-sufficient ; but let it also be understood, in what sense it is so ;—that it should extend to the
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forgiveness and final justification of obstinate and impenitent sinners, will plainly counteract the whole design of his mission, defeat the apparent tendency of the gospel, and contradict the express and repeated declarations of all his revealed will.

Is it not then a partial and dangerous representation which some make of the gospel, that it is merely a dispensation of grace and mercy, published for the pardon of sin and the consolation of sinners, without considering it as a summary of rules, given for the government of our lives, and the regulation of our practice? that all the spiritual comfort which it affords, arises not from any reflexions about what we have done, but from a confidential reliance on what Christ has suffered; not from any sense of the dutiful submission which we have paid to his commands, but from a devout recumbency which we have placed on his merits?

A due attention to God's general purpose in all his dispensations will also be the safest way of interpreting that "assurance of salvation, which the apostle attributes to true christians; if they compare their lives with the standing rule of God's commandments, if they examine with what fidelity they have obey'd the injunctions of their master, or made use of the gracious assistances of God's good spirit to form in themselves a truly religious temper, they can from hence have the most reasonable expectation of God's favour, and the best-grounded assurance of happiness. If they leave the steady direction of God's written word, they will be expos'd to the caprice of fancy, or the illusions of conceit. If withal they abandon the sober guidance of their understanding, they may become the sport of wild passions, and the dupes of a disturb'd imagination; they may mistake the swellings of vanity for the impressions of heavenly hope; and the

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confidence of a sanguine complexion for assurance convey'd to them by the spirit of God.

Let us deliver to our people the word of God pure and entire ; express'd in the clearest manner, explain'd by the best helps, enforc'd by the strongest motives we can use ; let us accommodate none of its doctrines to the temper or prejudices of weak men, to flatter them in the indulgence of any wrong passions, or alter in any respect the invariable terms of salvation, which the gospel has fixed for all it's followers. Let us give no such unjust impressions about the Sovereign of the Universe, as may induce men to think him a tyrannical or capricious Being—And let us not be so far provok'd by any misrepresentations made of us and our ministry, as to indulge an angry and vindictive spirit. Let us study to convince our hearers, that Christ's religion does not only relate to us, as a distinct body of men set a-part to teach it ; but

is the common concern of all who profess it, and that what we teach, is not to satisfy the forms, or to serve the interests of our profession, but out of a full conviction, that their happiness is nearly concern'd in these great truths; and let the good seed of religious knowledge, which on this occasion you have sown in young and tender minds, be so preserv'd and improv'd by your care, that it may produce it's proper fruits of obedience. Lastly, let all of us practice that method of instruction, which of all others is the most prevalent and effectual, to set before men the light of a good example; and let us make our devout application to the throne of grace, that God would so strengthen every good resolution, and forward every well-meant endeavour, that each of us in our respective stations may be enabled to execute the duties of our pastoral office with vigilance, constancy and success. 4 OC 58

T H E E N D.